

Komar and Melamid : Between War and Peace

Artists' Statement

1945: the end of World War II and the beginning of the U.N. era. The final meeting between Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill convenes. In two months Roosevelt will be dead, but in the old photograph of the Yalta Conference, they are eternally together. In the background, ministers, politicians, and bureaucrats—allies in black jackets and ties—pose for history's camera: we can feel the nations, centuries, and myths looming behind them.

1995: we are returning to this image 50 years later. Several years ago, our mural entitled *Allies*, scheduled to be painted near the United Nations building, was banned by city authorities. Now, we have created new versions of this mural. We are approaching a time of historical amnesia. How many New York schoolchildren, after playing a computer game in which Washington battles the British with the help of Lenin, would be surprised? How many remember the Yaltan prehistory of the Security Council? How has it come about that several countries can send UN troops into foreign countries? How many of us, no longer schoolchildren, feel comfortable with the fact that many nations don't have the power of veto in this international police state? And why isn't this "international" government elected in a democratic fashion by all nations?

We look at the half-century old photograph of the Yalta conference—we see a regent of the British Crown, an American president, and a Russian dictator—a true twentieth-century icon: Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin. At once triplets as well as a three-headed dragon—the visible symbol of all compromises, of bleak expectations and pragmatic hopes. For us, who were born during the final years of the war, the faces of these leaders blur together with faces from the family photo album: the faces of mothers and fathers in military uniforms. The end of war and the beginning of peace become indistinguishable, as does public history and the beginning of a private biography. Our biography belongs to Russia and to America. The spirit and the illusion of the Allies lives and mutates in our work. After the dissolution of the Soviet Empire, the image of *Yalta* changes as well. It becomes clear that after having swallowed Eastern Europe whole, communism became fatally poisoned. New Russia and Young America can not afford to forget this. We hope that our project will have a chance to become realized and once again will remind us of a great, contradictory lesson of history, of a great, bloody, and perilous political game. That is why we are returning to this theme and bringing out a new project before the public scrutiny.

Together with *Storefront for Art and Architecture*, we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II with an exhibition of several versions of our public art proposal. We have titled these works, created over a period of several years, *Between War and Peace*. A ballot box, which will literally allow the viewer to vote for his or her favorite version, is an integral aspect of the installation. We think that this approach will allow us to establish genuine contact with the public.

BALLOT

During this exhibition at the Storefront for Art and Architecture, Komar and Melamid are asking you to select your favorite version of Between War and Peace, a mural project dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. The purpose of this exhibition is to determine which version is most popular among our viewers and then submit that version to the National Endowment for the Arts and CITY ART INC., a community arts organization that is coordinating our project.

The versions are based on the last known photograph of Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin together, taken at the Yalta Conference shortly prior to the death of the American president, the end of the war, and the founding of the United Nations.

After acquainting yourself with the exhibit and the artists' statement (on the reverse), please write the number of your favorite version in the box below:

We would be grateful for any additional suggestions, remarks, or ideas, and for the following information:

Name: _____

Occupation: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

Please drop the results of this survey into the gallery's ballot box.

PUBLIC ART BELONGS TO THE PUBLIC !

Thank you.